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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on a two-semester experiment using computer technologies in the university political science classroom. The instructor incorporated electronic mail (e-mail), the Internet, and an on-line conferencing program into the course requirements for an upper-division course on the Supreme Court and an introductory honors tutorial on U.S. politics. The paper describes: (1) how each of these technologies was utilized to provide ideas on how to incorporate cyberspace in the classroom; (2) lessons learned from using a VAX Notes conference during the past year; and (3) how best to take advantage of Internet resources in the political science classroom. Appendixes include an introduction to computer conferencing with VAX Notes and un-edited VAX Notes Topics. (EH)

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Cyberspace and the Political Science Classroom

Reflections on Using the Internet and On-line Conferencing

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Introduction

This paper is a reflection on a two semester experiment using computer technologies in the political science classroom. I incorporated electronic mail (e-mail), the Internet, and an on-line conferencing program (Digital VAX Notes) into the course requirements for a upper-division course on the American Supreme Court[1] and an introductory honors tutorial on American politics.[2] In this paper I will do three things. First, I describe how each of these technologies was utilized in both classes, to provide some ideas on how to easily incorporate cyberspace in the classroom. Second, I discuss some lessons that I have learned from using a VAX Notes conference this past year. The paper concludes with some suggestions of how to best take advantage of internet resources in the political science classroom. With a little effort, cyberspace can become an integral supplement to the classroom experience. For those of us at institutions with limited resources, the internet is a vital tool to link students (and faculty) to the information age.

Cyberspace in the Classroom: an (un-scientific) Experiment

In an attempt to provide variety and promote creativity in my teaching, last fall I began to include computer requirements in the course I was teaching at the State University of New York at Albany. My goals were two-fold. First, I wanted to enhance my course by enabling students to access relevant materials on the internet. The internet has a wealth of resources for political science, ranging from full-text versions of the Congressional Record to presidential press releases to Supreme Court opinions. Unlike the same materials retrieved from commercial services like Washington Alert or Westlaw, the internet is free to any student with a university computer account. By introducing students to these resources, their

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[1] RPOS335, The American Supreme Court, The University at Albany, SUNY, Fall 1994 (3 credits).

[2] TPOS101 American Politics Honors Tutorial, General Education Honors Program, The University at Albany, SUNY, Spring 1995 (3 credits).

opportunities for research will be increased.

Second, I wanted to help students become familiar and comfortable with the internet and electronic mail. As we are rapidly entering a "digital" world, where people communicate in "bits rather than atoms," it is crucial that today's students are comfortable with - and proficient - in the information age.[3] As one of my students pointed out in a course evaluation, requiring use of the internet "forces the timid to merge onto the info highway; an integral part of all our futures. Either we become comfortable with it or get left behind."

What I did

There were three separate computer components of each course: electronic mail; an internet assignment; and a vax notes conference. Each served a different purpose.

E-mail

First, electronic mail or e-mail was used as a means to more efficiently communicate with students outside of the classroom. I required each student to submit their e-mail address to me so I could create a class distribution list. Using the mail program PINE, I could easily send a quick piece of mail to the entire class at one time. E-mail was used for several purposes. First, I encouraged students to communicate with me through e-mail. Throughout the semester I would receive mail on anything from questions about course content to explanations for class absences, to follow-up requests for letters of recommendation. Second, I used e-mail to send important information to students. Throughout the semester I sent them information about how to better use the university's computers. Handouts on various computer issues were distributed solely through e-mail. Occasionally I would forward copies of important materials to the class. For example, during my spring class, we spent time speaking about the rather odious internet censorship

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[3]For an intriguing analysis of the issues involved in the digital age see Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (Alfred Knopf 1995).

bill currently under consideration in Congress. After discussing the bill in class, I was able to download a copy of the bill text through the internet and send that copy to the whole class. On one occasion I used e-mail to provide students with an essay assignment that they otherwise would not have received for another week due to an unfortunate stomach virus that forced me to cancel class before a holiday. Finally, in my Supreme Court class, e-mail was provided as an optional way to complete a class assignment. Students were required to use the internet to find a Supreme Court opinion (described below) and to answer three questions about the case. They were given the option of sending their answer to me through e-mail. Although the vast majority of the class opted to use the more traditional method of typing or word processing their essay, almost 25% of the class used e-mail.[4] Several students commented to me that they chose not to use e-mail because the computer's default mailer did not have a very good editor, and they were concerned about having their work destroyed.[5]

Internet Assignment

The second use of computer technology in each course involved the internet. In the Supreme Court course, the students were given an "Internet Assignment." They were provided directions to access the Project Hermes database of Supreme

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[4] I should point out that receiving essays through e-mail can actually be more difficult for the instructor to keep track of. If the entire class used e-mail, I would have received more than 25 individual pieces of mail, creating some logistical problems.

[5] The quality of computer resources can be a real problem for instructors requiring e-mail usage. At the University at Albany, the VAX mainframe's default mail program (MAIL) is notorious for aborting long e-mail messages in process. If students forget to hit the "ENTER" button at the end of each line of text - it is very easy to generate a "buffer full" error and have the entire message aborted. Although more sophisticated mailers like PINE and ELM avoid such pitfalls, these problems are worth being awrae of.

Court opinions[6] using either FTP or the world wide web.[7] The students had to find a specific case from the 1993-1994 term,[8] have that case downloaded to their account, and then use the computer center to print it out. Each student was given three questions they had to answer about the case. All the instructions of the assignment were distributed through e-mail. As described above, the students had the opportunity to submit their answer through e-mail at their discretion. This assignment served two proposes. First, it was designed to demonstrate how easily information is available through the internet. Second, the assignment attempted to make students connect the concepts discussed in the course about how the Supreme Court functions to an actual court decision.

In the American Politics Honors Tutorial, there was no specific internet assignment per say. Rather, each student was required to make use of the internet as one of their research tools for the final seminar paper. Early in the semester class time was dedicated to explaining the various resources available on the internet, and students examined a copy of the *Internet Yellow Pages*, a 1000 page tome published by McGraw-Hill (2d ed. 1995) that provides references to thousands of internet resources.[9] As this was an honors seminar, I also held individual conferences with each student and discussed possible research strategies. By not structuring an internet assignment in the same fashion as I did in the Supreme

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[6] All Supreme Court opinions are available through Project Hermes within hours of their release. Decisions are available through e-mail, anonymous ftp, or the world wide web.

[7] The best way to access these decisions is through Cornell University's Legal Information Institute (http://fatty.law.cornell.edu).

[8] Students were asked to find *Harris v. Forklift Systems*, a 1993 case involving sexual harassment.

[9] Were I to do this assignment again, I would encourage students to make use of one of the excellent Web sites dedicated to searching for information. I have found the "Webcrawler" site (operated by America On-line) to be one of the easiest - and quickest ways to surf the net in search of information. The URL is http://webcrawler.com.

Court class, I would have to say that the outcome was generally less successful. Although the honors students wrote acceptable research papers, the amount of materials taken from the internet was minimal. This was a consequence of several factors. First, the subject-matter being researched was not always appropriate for "cyber-research."[10] For example, two students chose to write their papers on issues involving the founding of the Constitution - practically eliminating opportunities to use the net. Second, without providing students with specific instructions - and given them a concrete task to accomplish - using the internet as a research tool may have been more foreboding. Even though the class included several computer literate students, the majority were still novices at surfing the net. My experience this spring has taught me that in the future, more detailed instructions and guidance may be necessary for such assignments.

VAX Notes

The final component of the two semester experiment involved the use of electronic conferencing program called VAX Notes.[11] VAX Notes is a fairly simple program that allows students to engage in a collaborative computer mediated conference - or what has been referred to as CMC. VAX Notes enables the class to discuss issues of relevance to the course in a sort of computer journal. Students become members of a "conference" (in this case either Supreme_Court or American_Politics). The conference is composed of several topics and replies. I created several topics for discussion. Usually each topic was a several paragraph

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[10] I have higher hopes for my American Presidency course being offered this fall - as there is a wealth of information available on the presidency. See http://www.whitehouse.gov or http://thomas.loc.gov.

[11] Unfortunately, Vax Notes is only available on the VMS operating system. For professors at institutions with only UNIX machines, the opportunities for CMC are limited. Having just migrated to such an institution, I am now forced to adapt by conferencing efforts to the local USENET News server. For an analysis of the uses of USENET in the political science classroom, see Martha Bailey, "Usenet Discussion Groups in Political Science Courses," Proceedings, Annual Meeting, American Political Science Association, September 1-4, 1994.

question or issue I wanted the students to probe in depth. The students would read this topic and then reply to it. Their reply would then be read by every other student. This enabled students to reply to me - and then preferably - engage each other's ideas. An average conference topic would have been 15 and 20 replies in the fall semester and 10 or 11 in the honors seminar. Throughout each semester I would post a new topic approximately once every two weeks. Students in the Supreme Court course were required to participate once per month, while the honors students were required to participate in each topic. Students were encouraged to create their own topics for discussion, but this only happened once in the Supreme Court class.

VAX notes was a very valuable part of both classes I used it in, although it requires a substantial amount of work on the part of the instructor. At the beginning of each semester I needed to dedicate a substantial amount of time to explaining how to navigate the VAX computer, and how to use VAX Notes. Once students became familiar with the program, however, most students seemed to think it was easy to use.[12] Appendix 1 includes a copy of the six-page hand-out that I distributed to all students on VAX Notes.[13]

Reflections on Using VAX Notes in the Classroom

VAX Notes and CMC in general, are potentially a very valuable tool in the political science classroom. There are several lessons that I have learned from my two-semester experience using VAX Notes. First, it is fundamentally important that the instructor is very familiar with the program. If you are contemplating using a CMC - on VAX Notes or any other software platform - it is crucial that adequate time is given to gain proficiency with the software. Take the time to learn the commands that the students will have to know to use the program. Create a

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[12] When asked how easy Vax Notes was to use, 37.9% of the two classes said "very easy," while 51.7 % said "easy," and only 10.5& said "somewhat difficult."

[13] This document was adapted from a hand-out written by Dr. John Hughes, Ph.D. at Saint Michael's College in Vermont.

practice topic and experiment by "writing" a topic, and then "replying" to it. Learn how the directory structure works in VAX Notes. The conference directory is extremely important as it can show you what topics are available, and who has replied to each topic.[14] You should also learn how to use the moderator commands - those program functions that only the person in charge of the conference has access to. Especially important are the commands to delete topics or replies. Occasionally a student might post an inappropriate message, and you may need to delete it. Unwanted messages could range form the lewd and offensive to mere mistakes. By exercising some "file management" over the conference, you can ensure that it is kept orderly and easy to use.

Second, it is important for you to prepare some introductory materials for students on how to best utilize the program. As many students are still terrified of computers, having a hand-out will go a long way towards easing them into the information age. The hand-out included in Appendix 1 is illustrative of the type of materials which can be useful. Feel free to adapt this material to your own needs. You might also want to include some of this material in an introductory topic in your VAX Notes conference. Designate the first topic (1.0) to explaining what the goals of this endeavor is, and providing students with as much information as you think is valuable. I have also made it a practice to designate the second topic (2.0) as a "sample topic," where students can try out VAX Notes for the first time. Let them practice by describing themselves to the class in the conference. This puts them at ease, and makes them feel much more comfortable with the program. If it is possible, have the entire class meet in a computer lab, where they can view each other's comments as they are posted. Table 1 includes excerpts of the sample topic I used for the Supreme Court conference. Although clearly lighthearted, it served as a good ice-breaker to the conference.

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[14] Crucial here is the ability to make use of wildcards. The VAX Notes directory command (DIR) function very much like the Directory command found in MS-DOS. By typing "dir *.*" a complete listing of the conference will be generated. Typing "dir 2.*" will show all of the replies to topic 2.0.

Table 1. A Sample VAX NOTES Topic

```
================================================================================
Note 2.0                    A sample topic -PLEASE READ                 17 replies
ALBANY::MG1419                                    30 lines   7-SEP-1994 09:50
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    This is a sample topic.  Beginning next week, the instructor will add a
    new topic for discussion on a weekly/bi-weekly basis.  A topic is the
    basis for a new discussion.  I will often provide some background
    information and pose a question for you to consider.  After reading a
    topic note (which is identified by a whole number, i.e. 2.0; 3.0; 4.0)
    you can REPLY to the topic and add your thoughts to the discussion.  A
    reply can try to answer a question, focus on a specific aspect of the
    topic, or ask a new related question. Each reply will be numbered
    sequentially as 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, etc...

    You can also create a new topic for discussion on your own.  If you are
    confused by something in class or in the readings - or if something strikes
    your fancy -feel free to add a new topic.  If someone poses a question and
    YOU think you have an answer, throw in your own two cents.

    If you have a question which you would prefer isn't shared with
    everyone in cyberspace -then send an e-mail message.  IF you think,
    however, that other members of the class could benefit from a notes
    discussion on your question, then please write a note!

    As this is a sample topic, please feel free to post a reply.  What I
    would like you to do is REPLY to this message and add a paragraph of
    your own introducing yourself to the class.  Take a few minutes and tell
    everyone something interesting about yourself!  (This will help us get
    to know each other -and will help you learn how notes works!)

================================================================================
Note 2.3                    A sample topic -PLEASE READ                  3 of 17
ALBANY::PL8644                                    2 lines   8-SEP-1994 10:59
                              -<  Hi from Pauline >-
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    Hi!  My name is Pauline Charlebois.  I am a BA/MA student in Criminal
    Justice.  I will be done with my BA in December. (Yeah!)

================================================================================
Note 2.8                    A sample topic -PLEASE READ                  8 of 17
ALBANY::PR1795                                    4 lines   8-SEP-1994 10:59
                           -< Greetings from Paula! >-
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    Hello! My name is Paula Reinhart.  I am in my fourth year here at
    Albany.  I am a Criminal Justice major, but my main interests are
    in law.  When I graduate I plan to attend law school. I am looking
    forward to participating in this discussion!!!

================================================================================
Note 2.9                    A sample topic -PLEASE READ                  9 of 17
ALBANY::ER1489                                    7 lines   8-SEP-1994 11:00
                                 -< hello  >-
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    Hello! My name is Elizabeth (Liz) Rule. I'm an English major and Poli.
    Sci. minor.  I'm from Kingston N.Y. which is in the middle of no where!
    I have no idea what I want to do in life, however I think I might want
    to be a lawyer!  I am sharing my computer with someone else.  Here he
    is !  Hello.  My name is Eric Kaplan and I am a senior from Merrick
    Long Island.  I turn 21 in a few hours so I am really not thinking
    about class right now. See you later.
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Third, it is crucial in a VAX Notes conference to stay abreast of the conference at all times. Make sure that topics are regularly posted. One of the problems I encountered was getting so caught up in other work that I would occasionally forget to post a new topic when I said I would. This is a sure-fire way to diminish participation. If you say a topic will be posted by a certain date - be sure to post one. Many students will only log-in to the conference when they know there is a new topic to respond to.

The Fourth lesson is related to the previous one. Many students will gauge their participation in the conference to what they are required to do (understandably). If you tell them they have to participate in the conference every two weeks, then many students will log-in every two weeks - and no more. More importantly, many students will simply read the topic you (the instructor) posted, and reply to it. They won't always engage themselves in the conference by reading what other students have written, and craft their response to take into account their classmate's ideas.[15] One way to minimize this problem is to actively participate in the conference, replying to comments made by students, and asking them additional questions. Although this isn't always successful, it can generate an interactive discussion - the goal of the entire exercise.

Finally, I have learned to let each VAX Conference be measured on its own merits. What worked one semester, may not work the next semester. If the conference causes some students to think about political ideas and concepts outside of the classroom - and to write down their thoughts - the whole exercise may be worthwhile. Most teachers of political science believe firmly in the need to get students to write and think critically. Often times journals are useful tools to accomplish this. Unfortunately, to assign a class journal can often result in a substantial amount of outside reading for the professor - often forcing him or her to try to make out the student's chicken-scratch. On-line conferencing can have the same benefits, but without the chicken scratch!

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[15] I suspect this is less of a problem with a USENET news discussion, as the threads are not organized by topic.

For those still trying to understand the value of a program like VAX Notes, I have included two complete and unedited topics from my spring honors tutorial in Appendix 2. Although we all would wish that all our students were honors students, this topic is a good example of a VAX Notes conference. These topics include both serious commentary, as well as some ideological bickering among students.

Some Resources and Concluding Thoughts

Cyberspace offers the political science teacher a wealth of opportunities to enhance a classroom experience, whether it be introducing e-mail as a communications tool, using a computer-mediated conference, or having students "surf the net" as part of a research project. The problem for many faculty members, however, is learning how to best access these resources, without spending hundreds of hours learning UNIX line commands. Luckily, the commercialization of the Net - while troubling to many who yearn for the days when university's were the primary users of such services - has simplified access to much that is available in the on-line world. As a conclusion to this paper, I will mention two different types of resources that you - the political science teacher - can turn to.

Written Materials

First, in the past year there has been an explosion of written resources on the internet. There are literally hundreds of books available on using the internet. These books range from the telephone book-like *Internet Yellow Pages* to the *Netter's Guide to Trek* (a $20 book dedicated solely to finding on-line information about Star Trek!). There are even "Internet for Dummies" books available. Of the computer books, I would strongly recommend the *Internet Yellow Pages* as a good starting point for general perusing of net resources. Any one of the numerous "how-to" books, such as *The Whole Internet Catalog* (O'Reilly & Associates 2d ed. 1995) or *The Internet Companion* (Addison Wesley 1994), or one of the beginners books like

Internet for Dummies or *Finding it on the Internet* (Wiley 1994) are good starting points. There is even a *Internet 101 for College Students* (Osborne 1995) book available .

There are several good books on the computer culture of the 1990s that are worth reading. Of this genre, Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* is one of the best reads on the potential impacts of cyberspace. Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Harper 1994) is probably the best book available on the computer cultures that have emerged in the past decade in the Untied States and abroad. For a "Generation X" perspective on cyber-culture from a recent Harvard grad who has apparently spent most of her waking hours the last three years on-line late at night, J.C. Herz's *Surfing the Net* (Little-Brown 1995) provides a popular - definitely non-academic - look at the lives of Netheads.[16] For a look at the legal aspect's of cyberspace, Lance Rose' *The Law of the Net* (Osborne 1995) is invaluable. Finally, there are actually books available on finding materials relevant to political science on the internet. Congressional Quarterly has recently published its *Guide to the Federal Government on the Internet* (1995). This book, to be regularly updated, provides a fairly comprehensive listing of federal government resources available through the internet. There is also a version available for finding federal government information on computer bulletin boards.

On-Line Resources

I conclude this brief survey with a discussion of crucial on-line resources for the political scientist seeking to provide resources for students. Given my background in American politics, these listings will be more oriented towards domestic issues, although several of these resources include materials of interest for those in other areas. There are three crucial places to look for political science. First, the American Political Science Association's gopher (apsa.trenton.edu) is one

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[16] Although less valuable than Negroponte or Rheingold, *Surfing the Net* can be useful to better understand how many students relate to cyberspace.

of the best starting points for political science materials. Here you will find not only information relevant to the Association (such as an Annual Meeting program applicant's database), but topical material on all substantive fields in political science. Many of the sub-menus include valuable pointers to other non-APSA sites. The American Government gopher includes links to numerous net resources, including the presidency, congress, and the courts.

Second, the Library of Congress' website (http://marvel.loc.gov) and the Congressional website "Thomas: Legislative Information on the Internet" (http: Thomas.loc.gov) provide even the introductory student with ample resources. The Library of Congress' site provides links to a variety of resources, not the least of which is the ability to view some of the Library's electronic photo library. "Thomas," which is one of the only positive aspects to come out of the 104th Congress, is the brain-child of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and provides access to the complete text of every bill introduced in the 103rd and 104th Congress, plus the full-text of the Congressional Record. Future enhancements are going to include free access to bill digests.

The Web search programs like Webcrawler, Yahoo, or Netscape's Net Search are very important tools for finding specific items of interest. During the past few weeks, I have found a variety of resources such as an eight-page digest of the New York Times available free of charge (invaluable material for a New Yorker who has been recently transplanted to Western Colorado!). More and more newspapers are offering on-line editions - most free of charge, some for a small fee. The *San Jose Mercury* has such a detailed on-version that it is possible to subscribe to a customized comics page. One of my colleagues, an Ohio State alum, was able to find a web site dedicated solely to the Ohio State football team! Perhaps more relevant to political science, the search programs discussed here, can also provide a great deal of information of economic development, state and local governments, and much more.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the commercial on-line services like America On-Line, CompuServe, or Prodigy. Although I am partial to AOL, each of

these services provides a great deal of easily accessible information - if you are willing to invest a minimum of $10 per month. America On-Line actually has a forum dedicated to college teaching and political science in specific. Particularly interesting resources on AOL include Congressional Quarterly and C-SPAN, although there are many other relevant areas available.

This is just a small sampling of the resources that are available to the political scientist. Cyberspace can be a great way to enhance the political science classroom - as long as we remember that it is only an enhancement. At the very minimum, by learning how to access these resources, we can expand the opportunities for our student's learning.

Appendix 1.

Introduction to Computer Conferencing with VAX Notes

Professor John Hughes
Saint Michael's College

and revised by
Professor Miichael Gizzi
Mesa State College

An important part of our course activities this fall will involve participation by all students in a computer conference, using a utility on the VAX called VAX Notes. In the online documentation, VAX Notes is defined as

> ...a computer-mediated conferencing system that lets you conduct online conferences or meetings. Using VAX Notes, you can communicate conveniently and economically with people in difference geographical locations. Anyone connected to the system can participate, making it possible for you to receive input from many people without costly, time-consuming meetings.

While this description seems aimed primarily at commercial users, the possibilities of VAX Notes are attractive for this seminar for several reasons.

1) Online conferencing supplies a comfortable, asynchronous medium for all participants to exchange views on readings, class discussion, cases, or other assignments. Because participation is at your own time, absent the pressures that reticent students may feel in class, VAX Notes offers a more egalitarian format in which all students may be heard.

2) Similarly, the informality of VAX Notes should encourage participants to explore ideas in a more flexible, spontaneous, even playful way. This might unlock creativity that would be submerged in the more formal structures of communication that dominate academia. Writing your own notes, and reading others' contributions, should broaden your thinking about American politics. VAX Notes will be similar to a journal, only communal and interactive.

3) Computer environments are increasingly ubiquitous as the medium through with the business, political, and I forecast, scholarly communities will communicate. It can only be to your advantage to tell prospective employers come graduation time that you have experience working in a computerized environment.

4) Best of all, if we all take seriously our individual responsibilities for participation in the conference, this should be fun.

This document will explain the conference attached to this seminar, as well as introduce you to the fairly simple commands you will need to master in order to participate. Our conference will be known, without irony, as "American_Politics." An important point to remember is that in Conference, we are all equal.

Substantive Requirements

You will be expected to add a minimum of ONE conference note per week. I would anticipate that a significant note would take up about a screen, or more. Length, however, is not as important as quality. This conference is an experiment, so of necessity, this handout is rather vague regarding content. More precise requirements can be worked out in practice. I will ensure that you receive feedback on your conference participation at regular intervals, either in class, in private conference, or via e-mail.

Writing an effective conference note is a minor art form. Like a miniaturist, you must create an essay that conveys a complete thought, but within a minimum of space. It will be necessary to pare your prose down to the barest essentials. Make your point, but avoid excessive elaboration. Remember, a note is not filed simply for the purpose of filing notes. It should address some question, perhaps something not clarified for you in the readings, class discussion, or in a previous note, in a way that contributes to the conversation. Make sure you state this clearly. Your thoughts might well be tentative, even a bit uncertain. However, like any good conversationalist, one should observe a few common sense rules of etiquette. (Some of the following is freely excerpted and adapted from Timothy O'Neill's "Ten Suggestions" for seminarians, American Political Science Association)

1) Do not bull shit! Your opinions and observations are valued in this course, but they should reflect an understanding, at some inchoate level, of the subject matter under discussion. A willingness to examine your own premises, as well as those of others with whom you might disagree, makes for a top drawer conference. However, while you are expected to be informed, in this course it is safe to admit what one does not know. Certainly, it is preferable to trying to bluff your way though a conversation. When you have said enough to fairly represent your thoughts at this time, stop. Someone else may add important insight to your ideas, but only if you give them the chance. I suspect that all useful knowledge is really co-authored anyway.

2) Although disagreement, challenge, protest, even occasional ranting, is perfectly acceptable in a computer conference, do not attack the personality of an author or a speaker. No one is "wrong" simply because of who he or she is. A statement might be wrong (or more likely, weakly defended), but the individual who wrote or said it is not. This goes for distinguished Chief Justices and for the most confused conference participant. In this course, we honor each other and the insights each of us brings to the table. In short, THERE WILL BE NO FLAMING in this conference. I tend to be more protective of students than the current Chief Justice, but personal attacks will be deleted from the discussion.

3) Popular opinion is not the test of truth or falsity in this seminar. Do not attack or defend a position by saying "everyone knows that..." "Everyone" does not know squat! Besides, nothing useful is learned until someone has the courage to flout popular opinion, and try out a new idea. This and the previous note suggest that ideas may be evaluated and criticized on the basis of their own merits, and not on the basis of their pedigrees.

4) Read assigned material! Also read prior notes carefully, and make sure you represent accurately what another author has said. While writing replies, maintain the thread of discussion. If you find you positively must drift off topic because you have this really neat idea that you want to share, create a new discussion topic. Choose a title for your note that accurately describes its content--you want people to read it, and not to be irritated for having been misled. This is important!

5) You are here to teach as well as to learn. You are expected to help each other (and your instructor) to understand not only the texts assigned, but also how these cast light on the broader issues of American politics--and of life. Try to draw on what you have learned

throughout your college career, as well as the very different life experiences each of you brings to the seminar, to help us understand what is at stake in our discussion about American politics.

6) Take risks. Try out an idea, even if it is only tentative. What is the worst thing that could happen? You might sound like a blathering idiot--I've done this lots of times, and survived to tell the story. Alternatively, you might provoke a great discussion, learn, and teach at the same time. Learning and teaching are not passive exercises. Both require imagination--and imagination requires that we expose ourselves to the critical judgment of others. Perhaps that is why many of us manage to restrain our imaginations so well. This conference is a safe environment in which the benefits clearly outweigh the risks, so do experiment.

7) Although the VAX displays the address of all authors who post notes, it will be a requirement in this conference that all notes be signed with your full name. We will all take responsibility for our ideas, openly, and with pride.

Using VAX Notes

First, some conventions: a CONFERENCE is essentially a bulletin board with any number of postings concerning an agreed upon SUBJECT. Thus, we are a conference, and our subject is the United States Supreme Court. Our conversation will focus upon a number of TOPICS pertaining to many aspects of the Supreme Court, its structure and organization, its personnel, its role in the legal and political systems, its possible defects and alternatives, whether the basketball court located on the third floor of the Supreme Court building really is "the highest court in the land" and the medical ramifications of Sandra O'Connor's aerobics classes held there each morning, or whatever else might strike our collective fancy. Many topics will be supplied by the instructor, but all of you are free to start discussions of pertinent topics of interest to you--and you are encouraged to do so. A topic will consist of an essay raising some theoretical problem or issue, possibly posing questions for others to think about, and to which someone else might attach a REPLY. Topics and replies are both referred to as NOTES. A topic and its associated replies (a passel of related notes) will be called a DISCUSSION. The idea of a computer conference, of course, is that others will attach their own replies, and replies to replies, and so forth, resulting in an extended list of notes that constitute a lively and thoughtful conversation. The possibilities here are endless!

I hope you are clear about this vocabulary. To minimize confusion, I will try to follow it faithfully. Discussions are given sequential numbers, as are replies within each discussion, according to the format, Discussion#.Reply#. For example, our first discussion will be an introduction to the conference, with guidelines for participants. Suppose, however, our conference next contains a discussion entitled REHNQUIST'S LUNCH. It would be numbered by the VAX as topic 2.0, while the various replies might be: BACON, LETTUCE & TOMATO 2.1, WHITEBREAD 2.2, DILL PICKLE 2.3, CHIPS 2.4. If the next discussion is THE EFFECTS OF CHOLESTEROL ON JUDICIAL TURNOVER, it will be numbered 3.0. A reply to this topic entitled ARTERIOSCLEROSIS would be numbered 3.1, SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS OF SODIUM (CHIPS) might be numbered 3.2, CORONARY THROMBOSIS would be 3.3, while SINISTER LIBERAL CONSPIRACY would be 3.4. (Note: it works both ways--while hospitalized for minor surgery, Thurgood Marshall received a polite inquiry as to his well-being from the Bush White House. The Justice, known to be curt, sent back the reply, "Not yet.")

Joining a Conference

This all seems abstract, but will become clear with experience. Lets try it: after logging onto your account in the VAX, type NOTES <enter>. You have now entered VAX Notes. Look over the screen for a while, noticing the prompt NOTES> at the top left hand corner of your screen--quite different from where you are used to seeing prompts, at the bottom of the screen. If you have never entered VAX Notes before, you will not be a member of any conferences yet, but not to worry. Type at the prompt DIR /CONF <enter> for a directory of available conferences. Use the Enter key if the list exceeds a single screen. To add a conference to your notebook, type at the prompt ADD ENTRY <enter>. The computer will ask you which conference you wish to add. Type AMERICAN_POLITICS <enter>. You are now a member of the discussion group, and fully entitled to all rights, honors privileges and responsibilities implied therein! Henceforth, when you enter NOTES, your personal notebook will show that AMERICAN_POLITICS is available. You may, of course enter other conferences that interest you. May I recommend you try SAMPLE_CONFERENCE for more coaching and practice of these skills? Use ADD ENTRY for each conference you wish to join.

To join the discussion, you must now type OPEN AMERICAN_POLITICS <enter>. Later, to leave the discussion, you will use CLOSE <enter>. You do not need to use ADD ENTRY again, but each time you enter of leave the conference, the OPEN and the CLOSE commands are necessary. Note that this is also true if you want to leave one conference and enter another. You can use EXIT <enter> to leave VAX Notes and return to the VAX $ prompt, and perhaps log off and go home, but only after you have closed any conference that you have opened. If at any time you become hopelessly confused, do not panic. CTRL-Z <enter> will get you out of any jam, and take you to the next highest level of prompt. Used repeatedly, CTRL-Z will get you out of VAX Notes. Unfortunately, CTRL-Z will not get you out of debt, unhappy love affairs, college, the military, or taxes. CTRL-Z only works on computers.

Reading Notes

Now that our conference is open, you may want to look over a table of contents, indicating topics and the number of replies each topic has generated to date. Type DIR <enter>. Notice that each topic is accompanied by the date of the most recent entry--a date your instructor will be watching carefully--the number of replies, and the VAX address of the person who created the discussion. Nothing is done anonymously on the VAX, a fact you ought to keep in mind. How do you get a directory of replies? Ah, recall that topics are numbered, ie. 2.0. If you want to see a list of replies to topic 2, type DIR 2.* <enter>. The * is called a "wild card" and it does exactly what a wild card does-- it substitutes for any number that could be in that spot. Thus, if topic 2.0 has twelve replies, DIR 2.* <enter> will list 2.1, 2.2, 2.3...until the last entry, along with the titles supplied by the authors of each entry. Of course, if you already know that you want the third reply to topic 2 (Dill Pickle), you need only type 2.3 <enter> to get it. When you do this, you are actually using the READ command. However, if you do not supply another command, VAX Notes defaults to READ, so you do not have to type it (unless, of course you just want the practice).

After you have worked in VAX Notes for a while, you will notice that a little > will appear next to certain entries in the directory. If you are astute, you might also notice that this > appears at the first entry following the last note you read! Well, isn't that special! VAX Notes supplies its own little bookmark! Furthermore, if you simply type a topic number, ie. 2 <enter>, VAX Notes will take you immediately to this first unread note!

Unless you tell it to do otherwise, VAX Notes always starts you where you left off the last time you were logged onto VAX Notes. To read another topic, or another reply to the same topic, simply type the number followed by <enter>. 4 <enter>, or 4.5 <enter>, are valid commands for reading notes, assuming that such notes exits. You can also use the BACK or NEXT command to read the previous reply within a topic, or the next sequential reply or topic. These can also be used with extensions, ie., BACK REPLY, BACK TOPIC, BACK NOTE, or NEXT REPLY, NEXT NOTE, NEXT TOPIC. Get to know these commands--they are your friends.

You can also print a note or a entire discussion. This may prove helpful if you want to take a note to the library, or to your room to prepare a reply, or to bring it to class for discussion. If you are in the note you wish to print, simply type PRINT <enter>. You can pick up your hard copy later, at Computer Services. PRINT can also be used with qualifiers, such as PRINT 2.* for a complete exegesis of Rehnquist's lunch (topic note and all replies), PRINT 2.1-4 for a topic note and the first four replies, PRINT 2-4 for a range of topic notes, or 2.*-4.* for a range of complete discussions. We saw previously that these qualifiers also work with DIR.

Posting Notes

Now it is time to put your own two cents in. Suppose, after reading the previously described conference, you have something to add concerning the Chief Justice's choice of mayonnaise. You must be within topic 2, The Chief Justice's Lunch. Type REPLY <enter> to bring up the VAX Notes editor in a window. Well, the folks who wrote the software call it an editor. Alas, it is a pretty weak one. As you type your reply, you will find that the BACKSPACE still deletes the character to the left of the cursor, and the ARROW keys still move the cursor around, but not much else works. We will not be too persnickety about style and the niceties of expression. It would help if you think about your reply a bit before you begin to type it, perhaps making a few notes on paper. Do your best to be neat, clear and thoughtful, typing as much as you need to. If you screw up royally, you can bail out. Remember, you must sign all notes with your name.

After you have finished typing your reply (or it has finished off you), type CTRL-Z. You will be asked to supply a title to your reply, followed by <enter>. This title will then appear in the directory, and will be used by others to decide whether they want to read it or not. Choose a title that is descriptive of its content ("Mayonnaise: Silent but Deadly") and perhaps indicating that it is a reply to Note 2.3. A title may be as long as 63 characters, which should be plenty. After you have typed the title, you will be asked if you wish to enter your note in the conference. If you want to bail out, here is your last chance: N <enter> and nobody but you will ever know. If you are satisfied that you have said something useful, type Y <enter>. Just like that! Do a DIR 2.* <enter> to see if it worked.

Now, if you are creative, and you want to start a new discussion, you must type WRITE <enter>. Note the different function of REPLY and WRITE. The former is to work within a topic, while the latter is to start a new topic and invite others to add replies. After writing an appropriate introduction to the discussion (which should contain one or more questions about the topic), type CTRL-Z <enter>, supply a catchy but descriptive title and press <enter>, and then choose Y/N <enter>. Do a DIR at the NOTES> prompt to see if it worked. Your discussion should have a number, and after the passage of a short time, replies by other participants should start appearing, also numbered sequentially.

As moderator of this conference, I will exercise certain editorial powers over the content of the postings. I hope to administer this authority infrequently. I will, however, remove any note that I deem frivolous or offensive, in most cases after consultation with the author of the note. I may also have to delete old notes as we progress, should we start using up disk space faster that I had intended, so if there is a really good note that you want save, PRINT it. Finally, if you make a mistake that you cannot fix, say you use WRITE when you meant to use REPLY, let me know via e-mail (MG1419). I can fix it for you.

One absolutely final note: anything you place in the conference is available to the world--well, okay, to anyone in the world with a computer, but that is still a very large population. It is not a good idea to discuss matters of a private nature in Conference. Should you need to communicate with each other--or with me--in a more discreet manner, use e-mail (but make sure you send it to the correct address!).

We have covered just about all you need to know. For convenient reference, here is a table of VAX Notes commands.

COMMAND	DESCRIPTION
Notes	Invokes VAX Notes (from the VAX $ prompt--all others from Notes>)
Help	Displays Help for VAX Notes commands--can be used with any command you wish to learn about,ie., Help Write.
Dir /Conf	Displays available conferences
Add Entry	Adds a conference (which you will be asked to name) to your notebook.
Open <conference name>	Opens conference in your notebook, so that you can read or post notes
Dir	Lists topics in open conference
Dir <#>.*	Lists replies in numbered discussion
Read <topic# note#>	Displays text of numbered note(typing Read is not necessary)
Reply	Lets you post a reply within a topic
Write	Lets you begin a new discussion of a different topic
Show Members	Lists participants in a conference
Back	Displays previous reply in a topic
Next	Displays next reply, or if there are none, next topic
Print	To print note you are reading (also works with qualifiers, ie. 2.*)
Close <conference name>	Closes currently open conference
Delete Entry	Resigns from a conference
Exit	Ends your VAX Notes session

Appendix 2.

Un-Edited VAX Notes Topics.

TOPIC 3.0 - The Founding and Human Nature

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Note 3.0                    The founding and human nature              11 replies
ALBANY::MG1419                                      33 lines  31-JAN-1995 17:02
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In our examination of the political thought of the founding period, we are going to spend a fair amount of time looking at the different conceptions of human nature held by such individuals as Thomas Paine, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, the Anti-Federalists, and everybody's favorite - Tom Jefferson. These men each had different understandings about mankind's natural inclinations, although it is possible to find similarities among some (i.e., Hamilton and Madison; Paine, Jefferson, and the Antifeds). What is your take on these views of human nature? Who do you think had it right? Why? Should government be designed to promote virtue in its populace, or should it be based on the assumption that all people are selfish and ambitious?

Give it your best shot. Remember, several pieces of advice:

1) Read any other replies written by other students. Feel free to respond to each other's comments - even if it takes the conference into unchartered territory.
2) Debate is good; disagreement is good; personal attacks on authors is bad!
3) Always do a DIR command to make sure there aren't more than one topic currently being held.
4) Always sign your name!

Michael Gizzi

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================================================================================
Note 3.1                    The founding and human nature                1 of 11
ALBANY::DH2028                                      52 lines   3-FEB-1995 21:31
                         -< Assuming Man Is Selfish... >-
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The Federalist view held that humans by nature are selfish and ambitious, or as J. Madison stated, people are "much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for their common good." (The Federalist Papers #10). Although I do not agree with all of the views that were supported by the Federalists, I do agree with this. Examples can be found extensively throughout history and litters our present situation with problems today. Crime, social-economic issues political agendas and even capitalism all reflect the human race"s tendency to look out for its own self interests. These factors are not limited to our present situation, but of course our past. Shay's Rebellion reflected the Federalist's fears that too much power to the masses (non-elite) would lead to rebellious, unlawfullness; a serious accusation that would serve to discredit the anti-elite ,Anti-Federalist's view that people will adhere to "civic virtue". In fact, it did just that; lead the popular democrats to reserve some of the trust they put into the people...

One of the Federalist's strongest concerns was the faction. A faction is what we now know as a "special interest " group. The name describes its purpose; to advocate and work for a specific interest. In Federalist Paper #10, Madison defined the faction (when included in a majority) as something that will: "...sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest, both the public good and the rights of other citizens." (The Federalist Papers #10). His solutions included a small group of elected , educated officials, who would with the help of checks and balances and large republic, run the country effectively. Assuming that this small select group too, could be taken over by the natural tendencies of selfishness, the checks and balances and annual elections would serve to keep them honest. I should add here that I am not advocating either position of elite or democratic democracy, but rather

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suggesting that political affiliation or not, self-interest can and does seep into us because it is natural to us as humans. The Federalists themselves, it could be and has been suggested were acting for their own financial interests. Charles A. Beard argued in favor of this in "An Economic Interpretation Of The Constitution". Truthfully, can anyone make a serious claim against economics as one of the possible motives behind their views? I entertain any arguments that could cogently attempt to do so...

Evaluating the argument of the nature of man is an important one in understanding the history of our nation and the politics that pertain to it. It may be argued either way since their is no way of truly knowing the motives a group or person has; with the exception of assuming a conclusion based upon one's expressed thoughts and actions. Never-the-less, I must agree that human nature is selfish...

Dawn C. Hayes\dh2028

Note 3.2 The founding and human nature 2 of 11
ALBANY::JP9312 36 lines 5-FEB-1995 17:44
-< the nature of mankind >-

Just as governments (or arguments for what type of government is best) are complex, the nature of human kind is equally, if not more, complex. To say that "men are ambitious, vindictive and rapacious," as Hamilton does in Federalist #6, is only partially correct. To say that human nature is intrinsically good is also only partially correct. The primary goal, or nature, of mankind is to survive. So Paine is correct in asserting that in a state of nature, the natural tendency of humans is to work together for the benefit of the entire society. "No man," writes Paine, "is capable, without the aid of society, of supplying his own wants," or needs.

This natural "propensity to society," as Paine calls it, however, is prone to problems. Since humans are not angels, these seemingly ideal societies can be torn apart by man's built in abilities to be greedy and cruel. A society based on civic virtue cannot function properly once one member tries to satisfy his own selfish interests at the expense of the others (as survival becomes easier, the human instinct or nature to thrive often takes precedence over survival). The other people may find that they have to act upon their own interests in order to survive and/or thrive and the "every man for himself" attitude will in order to survive and/or thrive and the "every man for himself" attitude will bring down the society. As is the case with the US, the pursual of exceedingly selfish interests can cause most people in a society to believe that that is the true nature of mankind. While some will be selfish in order to survive, others are selfish due to the prevailing attitude of society that there's nothing wrong with being selfish .

Therefore, the ideal government is one that fosters civic virtue while at the same time allows for people to pursue their own interests. Laws would ensure that peoples' desires to thrive would harm the community. This government, obviously is almost impossible to achieve, especially in our current times. Dawn (as well as the Antifederalists) is absolutely correct in stating that social, economic and political situations affect how people behave. This demonstrates quite nicely how complex human nature is-that humans have the capabilities to both "vex and oppress each other" and to "cooperate for their common good."

-Jeremy Barnes (JP9312)

Note 3.3 The founding and human nature 3 of 11
ALBANY::WS8524 73 lines 5-FEB-1995 20:51
-< A Necessary Evil >-

James Madison and Alexander Hamilton had similar views of human nature, but with some notable differences. While both Madison and Hamilton believed that men, and mankind as a whole, were subject to the evils of an advanced society, Hamilton saw the evils emanating from confrontations between states, while Madison saw factions as the primary cause of the new nation's ill's.

"...there are still to be found visionary or designing men, who stand ready to advocate the paradox of perpetual peace between the

states..." said Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton thought that not only was war an impetus for confrontations between the states, but so too was commerce. This is a point that i agree with, and that can be understood by examining the most recent history (say the last twenty years or so) of our nation. Rivalries between states have often centered around aspects of business; which state is to be sought after by companies for business activities. We all have heard of companies that moved to other states to cash in upon the opportunities of that other state. If we think of a state as one very powerful individual, we can see that Hamilton was right-that confrontations do, in fact, arise between states. In a sense, his ideas of human nature center more around states as a whole, then around individuals.

James Madison believed that people, and especially factions, were inherently evil. "Among the numerous advantages promised be a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction" (Fed. #10). Madison fervently believed that factions (the interest groups of today) were bad, and caused many of societies problems. "The instability, injustice, and confusion introduced into the public councils have, in truth, been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished...". This statement epitomizes Madison's views of human nature. He believed that the common questioning of authority, unwillingness of citizens to accept legislative decisions, and the like were the problems that prevented government from running efficiently. Up to this point, Madison and Hamilton seem similar on their views of human nature. Hamilton seems to contribute the problems to states as a whole, especially the business interests of states, where as Madison attributes the problems to individuals. But for the most part, they are SIMILAR views. However, Madison makes an important statement which begins to distinguish him from Hamilton. "Liberty is to faction, what air is to fire" (Fed. #10). True, Madison believes that factions are evil but he also notes that they are the fuel which keeps this country going. They (factions) act as checks and balances on the activities of government officials. He continues by saying that there is no rational way of getting rid of factions. Madison has identified the problem of factions, but seems to offer little advice on controlling them. I think his intention behind this was to infer that as evil as factions were, they were necessary for the continuation of an advanced democratic society.

My instinct tells me that Madison is "more" correct than Hamilton. I, too, believe that human beings are selfish. I believe that factions are a "dangerous vice" (Fed. #10). Although it sometimes disturb me that interest groups seem to rule this country (at least in terms of what legislation is passed), I think this might be the most efficient way of getting things done. If you can get through Madison's wordy speech, I think he basically advocates the following: To get rid of factions without forgetting to abide by the "rules" that a just government is supposed to abide by. This balance, although, is probably one of the most difficult things for government to accomplish.

In conclusion, I believe that government should recognize that most individuals are greedy, self serving, and concerned with only those issues that directly affect them and those they care about, but at the same time understand this can be used to promote efficiency in government. Competition between individual groups, although they may be factious and selfish, is probably what keeps this country going. America was found on competition and on the desire for quality, and this is how government should be run. The evils of factions are, unfortunately, a NECESSARY evil.

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Note 3.4 The founding and human nature 4 of 11
ALBANY::MG1419 42 lines 6-FEB-1995 14:20
-< some more thoughts >-

Are we all evil, self-seeking brutes? Is self-interest the primary motivation behind our actions? The first three posts to my question suggest that the dim views of human nature espoused by good old Al and Jimmy Madison were completely right - and I am not going to suggest that you are necessarily wrong. I just wonder how such perspectives jive with the empirical evidence of human experience. For example, while I have little doubt that the world is full of losers, of people

who are concerned primarily with numero uno, I believe there are a lot of people who are equally concerned with doing the "right thing," with living their lives according to some sortof moral code. Why is it that some people are virtuous and some are so self-seeking? Perhaps the answer is simple: it is self-seeking for some people to be "good." AND perhaps it is necessary to design government in such a way as to control those less virtuous among us, so that the people who try to do good are protected...

I don't have any answers to these questions - partially because questions about human nature - about the human condition - are questions to which answers have been sought for ages, and partially because I want us to explore these questions (and I don't want my views to influence yours to the degree that you stop to think for yourselves).

Those of you who agree with Al Hamilton's views, I ask another question. Are you satisfied with your answer to the question. Is it pleasing to accept the answer Hamilton (or Madison) provides. If we simply accept that human nature is ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious, will these prophecies come true? If we recognize that "men are not angels," can't we still strive to find ways to organize society (and govt) in such a way as to promote virtue - and diminish self-interest?

Michael Gizzi - mg1419

PS I am very happy with your responses so far. Keep up the good work. AND don't worry about being formal in this forum. Its ok to use the conference as a sounding board for your thought. Think of this as a collaborative journaling effort! A good note need not (although it may) resemble a formal essay assignment. Good luck

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Note 3.5 The founding and human nature 5 of 11
ALBANY::JT1530 16 lines 7-FEB-1995 12:19
-< A Balance in Human Nature >-

Human nature can be good or evil. It can be said that people are self-serving, but we cannot ignore that people also care about the interests of others. There are examples of the good and the bad in people. I do disagree with the notion that the masses are self-serving while the elites are capable of caring for the common good. Everyone has some good and some bad in him or her. I think that the founders of this government might have assumed a nobleness about political leaders that does not exist. It quite evident throughout American political history, and especially twentieth century American politics, that politicians, in general, are not virtuous in their goals, but rather very self-interested. The point I am trying to make is that human nature is a mixture of good and evil in every person and is not determined by class or education.

Jessica Templin JT1530

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Note 3.7 The founding and human nature 7 of 11
ALBANY::DL2437 17 lines 15-FEB-1995 20:57
-< human nature elitist or populist? >-

Since the beginning of class, I have discovered in the lectures, tutorial, and discussion that most students have described themselves as either elitists or populists. I agree with the elitist view in terms of the functions of government. I feel that it would be extremely difficult for the government to perform its job without representation, yet on the other hand I take the populist stand when discussing human nature. I do not believe that any person elite or not has the right to make such a negative judgement about the nature of the american people. One of the core reasons that the founders of this country worked for independence and the democratic system is because they had faith in the people. This faith is what the ideals of our country are based upon. Yet there are many who take advantage of the many freedoms which we possess. There is evidence of this every time we

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turn on the evening news. The united states has one of the highest crime rates in all of the world. But this is no reason for lack of faith in the people, for there are plenty of american citizens who greatly lack self interest.

Note 3.9 The founding and human nature 9 of 11
ALBANY::JH1365 28 lines 16-FEB-1995 13:33
-< a little of both >-

It is obvious that the federalists and anti-federalists had conflicting views on how people act. In federalist #10 Madison suggested that man was selfish and controlled by his own self interest. Although this may seem true at times I think that we have to look at the circumstances which have been brought upon us. If everyone was interested in civic virtue and public good for everyone as the anti federalists had argued, then why are there such separations between the haves and the havenots. Shouldn't the rich look out for the poor so that everyone can be equal? This does not seem to be the case.

I believe that selfishness has been forced upon us as a way to survive. In other words, the survival of the fittest. If government was set up so that everyone could put in their two cents and let other people know what their concerns are, there would be less competition and therefore less selfishness. This supports the idea of a small republic. This country has gotten to the size that it is literally impossible to get your voice heard as a single individual. This creates a sense of insecurity and hence need to move ahead in your own self interests.

In other words, I believe that people can be virtuous and unselfish if they are given the chance to and if they are ignored than they feel that their acts of virtue are useless. That is what has happened in this country. I hold a view which has both federalist and anti-federalist arguments, so if I was thrown back in time and forced to make a decision on the Constitution, I would be in a real dilemma.

jerry
JERRY

this country and thus people are selfish and unvirtuous.

Note 3.10 The founding and human nature 10 of 11
ALBANY::MM5088 38 lines 21-FEB-1995 02:59
-< Nature >-

The men of Federalist or elitist thinking during the period of the founding held the particular view of human nature as being basically dismal. These men held little faith in the common person... Madison in Federalist 10 said of the common man of the day,"people are more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for their common good." This is why they felt that the government should be placed in the hands of the elites, that any goodness to be found, within educated and "public-spirited" men like themselves. Although it is true that Madison conceded to their being goodness found elsewhere, but good government can not be based on the "goodness of the masses". Hamilton agreed with this bleak view of human nature and saw men as "ambitious, vindictive and rapacious". He foresaw the filling of the executive position in government by elites "preeminent for ability and virtue." On the flip side of the coin we have Paine and the Anti-Federalists. As Paine pointed out through Common Sense, man tends to form society through needs, and once a society is formed, from it grows a need for government, government being a "necessary evil". He points out the fact that although he feels that man is basically one step away from virtue, if he were pure good, then there would be no need for government at all. The Anti- Federalists were not pure optimists when it came to the topic of human nature.. they admitted that ambition and greed could disfigure. BUT they felt that this could be overcome through morals, education and religion, and that virtue could be perpetuated through republican ideals and active participation in the government. I would have to agree with the view point of the Anti-Federalists. I do not have an overtly optimistic view about the nature of most, but it certainly does not tend toward the pessimistic. I believe that most people are good, but just need to be motivated.

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Government SHOULD be designed to promote virtue and the participation in government and the awareness of the masses, but at the same time, I also believe that government should assume that people are selfish, because if it doesn't then the government will be left open to benefit the selfish, and not protect itself or the majority from these people. Government should not be exclusive, people should want to make their citizenship count and the government should facilitate that... people(non-elite)will most often rise to the call of their civic duty and do what is best for the public good (especially if it helps them, which most times is the same thing).

TOPIC 5.0 Explaining the Elections of November Past

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Note 5.0            Explaining the elections of November past        10 replies
ALBANY::MG1419                                    18 lines   1-MAR-1995 09:49
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Considering our current examination of American Ideologies, I thought a nice subject for on-line discussion would be the elections of 1994. Ever since November 8th, we have been told (by both the media and the Republicans) that we have witnessed the beginning of a new Republican era - a conservative era. The conservatives may have taken a beating in 1992, but two years later, the American people voiced their strong agreement with the Republican party and the ideas that the Republican's espouse (see the Contract with America).

The question I want us to explore - and I will put in my own two cents worth as well! - is how would you assess the meaning of the 1994 elections in terms of the ideologies we have studied? Was this a major realignment of the political spectrum towards conservatism? If so, what variant of conservatism? Or is the answer more complicated? This is your chance to play spin doctor! Try to explain your answer.

There is no correct answer to the question. Just give it your best shot!

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Note 5.1            Explaining the elections of November past          1 of 10
ALBANY::JS2382                                    18 lines   9-MAR-1995 05:43
                          -< conservative in the 90's? >-
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The 1994 elections are an obvious change in direction towards conservative views...
Basically, We had to suffer through 4 years of liberalistic nonsense in which practically nothing was done...
Granted, nothing harmful came of our stature in the world's international structure, but what positive came of it?
Failed Health care ideas? Welfare Reform?? A bunch of nonsense...
Regardless, the conservative switch which we are going to see in the near future is a confusing one...The way I see it, Reform policies are going to be dampered a bit in order to preserve traditional ways of viewing the economy. However, if something isn't done about certain policies, the Republicans are not going to maintain their power for much longer than the democrats...So the real way we can look at the future or near future of politics for the late nineties is a mixture of conservative reform on liberal policies...
Do you see what I mean?
Jason Samuels...

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Note 5.2            Explaining the elections of November past          2 of 10
ALBANY::DH2028                                    27 lines   9-MAR-1995 09:41
                          -< What is so shocking? >-
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It seems a little early to say for sure if the Republicans will remain in power, but I feel that by the next 3 to 4 months we'll be hearing complaints about them(as if we aren't hearing it now). The problem with calling the 1994 elections a major realignment to the conservative side is an overstatement. American ideology has never been so liberal as it now exist today... The elections represent what should have been expected. They include two factors. The first involves

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voting out of power whoever does not seem to cut the ice. For U.S. citizens, this usually means voting a party out- not just the individual. The second factor involves the proportion of citizens who vote and are aware of what they're voting for; and as it's well known that's not a lot of people. Those who voted not for the sake of change alone were pretty much aware of the fact that voting Republican would not be the sweetest deal, but the benefits which they gave priority may have outweighed the costs. I don't know if the change in power was something that was shocking in it's occurrence as it was shocking that it occurred so quickly. Regardless of the debate over whether a shift to conservatism took place, one important message remains clear. Those who vote no longer have patience to deal with promises that won't be delivered . No delivery equals no vote.
dh2028

Note 5.3 Explaining the elections of November past 3 of 10
ALBANY::JT1530 12 lines 9-MAR-1995 14:02
-< A Change? >-

The elections of 1994 did not represent a shift toward a more conservative American public. It is obvious from the current conversation nation-wide that people are not happy with Republicans either. The people want government to accomplish something. The people want to give control to those who will spend their time doing something besides arguing with the opposing party. Obviously, this isn't happening. The electorate is looking for how its interests will best be served. Switching the control of Congress from one party to the other represents, in part, a desire to see the interests of the people addressed. This is what the Republicans tried to do in their election campaigns. Although this is not the only factor influencing the election, it is a major one.

Note 5.4 Explaining the elections of November past 4 of 10
ALBANY::WS8524 25 lines 19-MAR-1995 20:58
-< Change is Good? >-

We are not witnessing the beginning of a new Republican era. Like the business cycle or the weather or many other issues, things progress in cycles. Two years ago the Democrats seemed to be unstoppable. Now that the republicans are in control are we supposed to believe that they will
always be in control? I don't think so. The media wants to (and has to) make the most out of this change of power. The media wants to make news where news doesn't really exist. This is not to say that the republicans are not important. Of course they are. But in two years, who knows what could happen. Politics is dependent upon what and who the media reports about. Maybe the press will see the Democrats as the underdogs fighting for survival and propel them enough to allow them to regain control of Congress. However, the current Republican administration is definetly unique. I see them aligned somewhat with populist conservatives. The conservatives, under the leadership of Gingrich and Dole, are really pushing CHANGE. And that change in a backwards direction. Dole has recently promised the NRA that repealing the ban on assault weapons will be a priority of the senate. The conservatives have no concern for health care. They want to wipe out the school lunch program, and kill welfare. They are aligning their values in a more traditional way. They want to make life more simple (so they tell us), by concentrating on "family values". So, although the Republicans today look different then they did a few years ago, and although they are making many changes, we are not witnessing a shift in our nations political alignment.

Note 5.5 Explaining the elections of November past 5 of 10
ALBANY::JS2382 23 lines 19-MAR-1995 21:54
-< defense for cons. >-

There's just a few things I'd like to say about the last statement... Number one, I believe the conservatives are trying to revert back to traditional values within governmental control simply because it

doesn't work the other way!
How many problems have we seen with our economy since liberal ideas became mainstream in the 60's?? WAY TOO MANY, Thomas Paine would be rolling over in his grave if he didn't decompose already if he was to see what happened to our government in the past century. THE GOVERNMENT was NEVER created to support the people, which in essence makes the people into blood-sucking leeches on the fleshy back of our economy...Well, the blood will run dry unless some cuts are made and made soon...I can see where conservatives are coming from, and obviously I am not a cruel heartless person...I don't want to see GOP cuts, no school lunches, health care cuts etc etc....It hurts people, but in reality, our previous generations set us up for a major crash when the population became dependent upon the government!
Change is a necessity, and I don't believe we have even seen the tip of it yet...The conservatives won't retain power for long probably, but I guarantee that it will have an effect. Better than nothing! and thats exactly what we had when democrats were in power...
Well, we'll see in the near future....
Jason...

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Note 5.6 Explaining the elections of November past 6 of 10
ALBANY::JP9312 23 lines 22-MAR-1995 14:05

-< taxes >-

The AFLCIO add that Mike mentioned was in the Albany Times Union only confirmed what I believe to be one of the major reasons why the Republicans had such a sweeping victory. Ever since the election, I felt that the people who voted, generally speaking, were either greedy and selfish or were not thinking properly. The overall republican position was a change in the country that focussed on lower taxes and cutting the "fat." I think most people heard the lower taxes pledge and without thinking about anything else, were sold. The AFLCIO add that claims people voted for change but not for the changes underway shows that people were totally unaware that cutting taxes would force cuts to be made in social services. It should have been obvious that this would happen, though. People in this country have always had fears of high taxes and any government action that looks like an act of socialism or communism in even the slightest way. So to defend their sometimes greedy capitalistic interests, people voted for the Republicans on one issue without taking time to consider the consequences. Because people are now beginning to realize their mistakes, I don't think that the republicans won a major long term victory though (at least I hope not). Also, if most of the people who did not vote actually voted, especially in terms of the Cuomo-Pataki campaign, the outcome would most likely have been different.
-Jeremy (JP9312)

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Note 5.7 Explaining the elections of November past 7 of 10
ALBANY::MG1419 18 lines 22-MAR-1995 15:11

-< comments >-

Jason has been taking the position that the conservative rise in power is a response to the backlash of excessive social programs in the 1960s. He is taking the classic conservative position against New Deal Liberalism. But were things so much better in the good old days (I guess pre-New Deal)? And what are these traditional values we need to accept? I guess, when I look at the fact that the conservatives are supported by big business interests - and big business is controlled by a small, very wealthy elite - I am a bit suspect about how "traditional" values will save America. Are these traditional values simply laissez faire; are they an attempt to turn power back to the states; or is all of this re-birth of federalism just smoke and mirrors to try to minimize regulation of the economy? If so, then say good bye to clean air, water, safe workplaces, and sesame street.

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Note 5.8 Explaining the elections of November past 8 of 10
ALBANY::DL2437 18 lines 27-MAR-1995 21:25

-< ?? Conservative or Liberal?? >-

In all honesty, I do not have a definite opinion of the control of the

Republicans within government, I do not know enough about the current situation of the conservative/liberal conflict to make a statement, I can only make an observation. Everyday, I go to class and sit down in the same seat, next to the same girl. She is able to go to school here because she benefits from the EOP program. The other day in class, she mentioned that she was going to the SUNY rally. Why? Because she wants to be here next semester living, and learning at SUNY Albany. But her education is threatened because of the proposed cuts by Governor Pataki. The other day I was speaking on the phone with my mother and we discussed housing sign up for next semester. During out casual conversation of this, she added, with a hint of sarcasm, how she will be paying an extra $2,000 for me to attend a state school. These are just a couple of examples of observations which I make everyday about the changes which the conservatives are making. I may not know enough to form an opinion, but as of now its not looking too good..... Deb
paying an extra $2,000 for me to attend a state school

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Note 5.9 Explaining the elections of November past 9 of 10
ALBANY::JH1365 16 lines 28-MAR-1995 08:56
-< stalemate >-

The changes we've seen in the way that Americans are voting has nothing to do with liberal/conservative views in the broad scale of American voters. Americans are only voting for anyone who says that they can make their life better and when they fail to fulfill their campaign promises, they are voted out in the next election. This may not be the case for the informed voters, although I believe that the majority of voters just don't have enough time in their lives to learn all of the facts of the running politicians. I perceive the 1994 elections as a continuing trend of deallignment stemming back to the post Reagan years, since where no party has had a stronghold on the other. One party takes control and doesn't satisfy the average American middle class worker, and then they get voted out of power to see if the other party can do anything for their cause. I think that its a good sign that the Republicans are actually trying to stir up some action, although I believe that they are aiming their cuts at the wrong people which will prove fatal to their cause in the next election.

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Note 5.10 Explaining the elections of November past 10 of 10
ALBANY::MM5088 17 lines 4-APR-1995 23:26
-< Election '94 >-

As of now, even though we have discussed some of the Republican issues that are being brought to the forefront of politics today, I am still not entirely clear of "the big picture". But from what I do know, I do not think that the fact that no Republican incumbents were defeated signals that people are leaning towards conservative ideals. There has been, of late, an incumbency rate at about 90%. I think what is more significant is the fact that a large number of Democratic incumbents were defeated. This is an indicator that people are indeed moving away from the Democratic party, or at least from the view that they have of the Democrats that stems from the disenchantment with the Presidency. Yet, I do not think that the American public is truly looking for these conservative ideals, but realistically it is the only choice available.I think a more significant indicator of the public's desires will be the next Presidential election, the outcome depending on possible changes in Clinton's popularity, and whether or not the Republican bodies have brought forth the promised legislation, and have had positive results.

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